§ 21-586. *Financial responsibility for care of hospitalized persons; judicial enforcement*

(a) The father, mother, husband, wife, and adult children of a mentally ill person, if of sufficient ability, and the estate of the mentally ill person, if the estate is sufficient for the purpose, shall pay the cost to the District of Columbia of the mentally ill person's maintenance, including treatment, in a hospital in which the person is hospitalized under this chapter. The Commission on Mental Health shall examine, under oath, the father, mother, husband, wife, and adult children of an alleged mentally ill person whenever those relatives live within the District of Columbia, and ascertain their ability or the ability of the estate to maintain or contribute toward the maintenance of the mentally ill person. The relatives or estate may not be required to pay more than the actual cost to the District of Columbia of maintenance of the alleged mentally ill person.

(b) If a person made liable by subsection (a) of this section for the maintenance of a mentally ill person fails so to provide or pay for the maintenance, the court shall issue to him a citation to show cause why he should not be adjudged to pay a portion or all of the expenses of maintenance of the patient. The citation shall be served at least 10 days before the hearing thereon. If, upon the hearing, it appears to the court that the mentally ill person has not sufficient estate out of which his maintenance may properly be fully met and that he has relatives of the degree referred to in subsection (a) of this section who are parties to

the proceedings, and who are able to contribute thereto, the court may make an order requiring payment by the relatives of such sums as it finds that they are reasonably able to pay and as may be necessary to provide for the maintenance and treatment of the mentally ill person. The order shall require the payment of the sums to the District of Columbia treasurer annually, semiannually, quarterly, or monthly as the court directs. The treasurer shall collect the sums due under this section and turn them into the Treasury of the United States to the credit of the District of Columbia. The order may be enforced against any property of the mentally ill person or of the person liable or undertaking to maintain him in the same way as if it were an order for temporary alimony in a divorce case. (Sept. 14, 1965, 79 Stat. 760, Pub. L. 89-183, § 1, effective Jan. 1, 1966.)